

Mandatory retirement axed as every area rep votes yes

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Forced retirement.
The words raise an icy chill in many who are approaching life's golden age, which is traditionally marked by the 65th birthday.

An amendment to the Michigan Civil Rights Act, which was recently approved by a 97-2 vote in the Michigan House of Representatives, would put an end to mandatory retirement in both the public and private sector. It is currently being considered by the state senate.

The bill gained the support of every representative in the Observer & Eccentric circulation area, including: John Bennett (D-Redford), Thomas Brown (D-Westland), William Keith (D-Garden City), Jack Kirksey (R-Livonia), Robert Law (R-Livonia) and Roy Smith (R-Ypsilanti), whose district includes most of Plymouth.

In Oakland County, Reps Wilbur Brotherton (R-Farmington), James Delebaugh (R-Birmingham), Joseph Forbes (D-Oak Park), Richard Fessler (R-Union Lake), Ruth McNamee (R-Birmingham) and Sal Rocca (D-Sterling Heights) supported the bill.

The only two dissenting votes came from Reps. Joseph Young (D-Detroit) and Mary Brown (D-Kalamazoo). "This legislation," said Rep. Perry Bullard (D-Ann Arbor), the bill's sponsor, "guarantees the right of every Michigan citizen to work and contribute to the economy without regard to age."

"Freedom of choice" seems to have been the bill's major selling point.

"These individuals who retire on Social Security and a small pension often discover that they have too little money to live even modestly," Bullard said. "Such people often desire the option to continue working, but are forced to retire instead. They often become impoverished."

"There are still going to be a number of people who are going to retire, but this gives them the option to continue working," he said.

Opponents of the ban on forced retirement argued in House Civil Rights Committee hearings that the bill would rob younger people of job opportunities. Bullard, however, estimated that only about seven per cent of retirement-age workers would want to continue working.

AREA REPRESENTATIVES voiced more concern about the effects of forced retirement on those being forced to retire.

"It doesn't make sense for those who are still going full tilt both physically and mentally. It practically ended the lives of some of those people who had

worked all of their lives," said Forbes, Democratic floor leader.

"I know of a couple of instances where mandatory retirement has been like cutting the cord to life for them. Working gives them the will to go on," Forbes said. "Some just retire into oblivion."

Even though the bill makes an option available, there could apparently be some problems.

"It's designed to eliminate traumatic experiences. I think it'll have the opposite effect in some instances," Brotherton said.

He said that before the bill, companies would "carry" some of their older employees until they retired. He said, "Companies used to say 'Let's not demand as much of them. Let's put them in an advisory capacity.'"

"Now," Brotherton said, "if a person doesn't have to retire, the company might be forced into making cruel decisions. They'll have to say 'You can't cut it.'"

"It's all up on the table then," he said.

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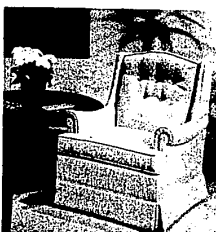
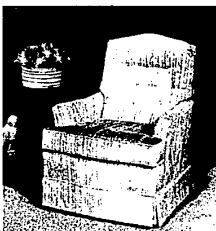
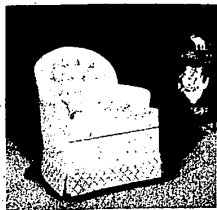
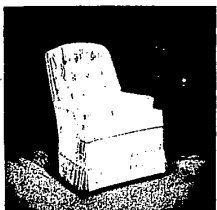
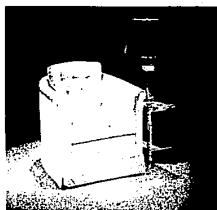
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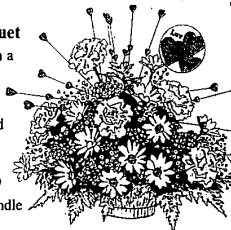
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